



Department of Children and Families (DCF) Services to Prepare Youth Aging Out of State Care

Background

In June 2013, the PRI committee authorized a study to assess DCF services to prepare youth aging out of state care. The study is also examining coordination between DCF and other state systems and services involved in transitioning the DCF population aged 18 and over.

Using a results-based accountability (RBA) framework, the study will answer the questions: *How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?*

For study purposes, the target population includes older youth - aged 18 and over who are voluntarily receiving services from DCF. The study will also explore services aimed at adolescents aged 13 and over who are committed to DCF's care and custody.

DCF provides adolescent and transitional services intended to assist youth under its care making the transition from out-of-home care to a self-sufficient, productive life as an adult in the community. DCF provides case management services, monitoring, and support services through a variety of programs.

Since June, committee staff has had ongoing meetings with DCF staff from the Adolescent Services Division as well as with other agency staff on a number of cross-cutting topics. Interviews have also been conducted with program personnel for the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), Developmental Services (DDS), and Social Services (DSS).

In addition, committee staff has heard from representatives of several youth advocacy groups, former and current DCF youth, social workers and other interested stakeholders, as well as research experts on transitional issues for foster care youth and specialized treatment services.

Main Points

Youth "age out" when DCF is no longer responsible for their care and custody because of age. Typically, this is the age 18.

About 5% of all youth receiving services from DCF are young adults (ages 18-23). Youth may choose, under certain conditions, to voluntarily remain with DCF until 21 – or, if completing education, until 23. Many of these youth are in independent living programs. A large portion entered DCF when they were 13 or older and have been in placement for much longer than three years.

Adolescents aged 13 to 18 – who DCF aims to prepare for aging out – most commonly are in foster care. About 43% of all children and youth under DCF's care and custody (i.e., "committed" to DCF) are in this age range. Similar to the young adults, many of these youth entered DCF when they were 13 and older but have been in placement for three years or less.

DCF assists certain youth transition into other state agency programs. DCF makes referrals to DMHAS Young Adult Services and transfers clients to DDS. In FY13, DCF made 280 referrals to DMHAS and transferred 84 clients to DDS.

Nationally, young adults who have aged out of care face relatively poor outcomes. Research findings suggest they are less likely to graduate from high school, engage in post-secondary education, and be employed – and more likely to experience homelessness and justice system involvement. There is emerging research evidence that youth fare better if they remain in care until 21.

Despite facing challenges and relatively poor outcomes, there are young people leaving state care who do well.

Research on brain development shows that adolescents and young adults are still developing. This research supports the distinction between youth and adults may be best made based on characteristics other than age such as impulse control and judgment. It also highlights the need to explore trauma-informed practice.

All young people need supports as they transition to adulthood. Critical supports include education, workforce opportunities, housing, health, family connections, and community relationships.

Next Steps

1. Continue to develop RBA framework using the CT Kids Report
2. Compile and analyze core performance measures
3. Continue to examine DCF's specific strategies for this population
4. Follow up on identified issue areas
5. Develop findings and recommendations